

Responsible Whale-Watching

Threats to marine mammals from badly organised excursions are mainly the result of poor and insensitive boat handling. Restricting the animals' freedom of movement is the cardinal error, to be avoided at all costs.

If you are fortunate enough to spot whales or dolphins on your trip, handle your boat with sensitivity and caution. Let the animals themselves be your guides; it is up to them, not you, to decide the agenda of your meeting. Their liberty should not be compromised in any way, no matter how apparently benign the intervention may seem to you. Excepting only the safety of members of your party, the welfare of the mammals you are watching should always be your first priority.

In addition to formal regulations, here are a few simple guidelines to help you get the best out of your marine mammal expeditions in Sri Lankan waters:

- Never instigate physical contact – **do not touch the animals!**
- Use appropriate angles of approach. *Never* approach cetaceans from directly ahead or astern.
- Switch off all sonar and depth-sounding equipment to avoid noise pollution.
- Approach no closer than 50m (for boats up to 6m long) and 100m (for larger vessels). Leave decisions about making closer contact to the animals themselves; dolphins, in particular, will often oblige.
- Friendly cetacean behaviour (such as bow-riding) should be welcomed but never instigated or cultivated by feeding or calling out to the animals.
- Do not drop food or litter, particularly plastic bags (deadly to many forms of marine life) in the ocean. **Never feed animals in the wild.**
- Avoid sudden changes in speed, direction or noise level.
- Do not chase, head off or encircle individual animals or groups.
- Do not move through a pod or between groups so as to separate group members.
- Take special care around mother/calf pairs, solitary calves and juveniles.
- If unsure of the animals' movements or intentions, simply put your engine into neutral and enjoy their company.
- Avoid spending more than 15-30 minutes in proximity to a marine mammal or mammals.
- Contact should be abandoned if, at any stage, the animals show signs of becoming disturbed or alarmed. This is for the safety of your expedition party as well as the comfort of the animals.
- When entering, leaving or operating within 400m of a marine mammal, travel at 'no wake' speed.

